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The Army's EO Program and Policies



Lesson 12: Concepts of Culture

Overview

- Define culture, subculture, and enculturation
- Discuss attributes and non-attributes of culture
- Discuss the concept of race and ethnic group
- Discuss the implications of cross-cultural interactions
- Discuss the pitfalls in cross-cultural interactions



Introduction

- The following statement was taken from an article about the different customs of Southwest Asia (Saudi Arabia).
- *“never sit with the sole of your shoe or the bottom of your feet exposed to an Arab as it is considered an insult.”*
- This statement is a good example of how different American culture is compared to other cultures.
- The Army, like society, is made up of a large ethnic and gender mix.
- This mix or differences are sometimes seen through skin color, language, attitudes, and mannerisms.



Introduction (continues)

- As soldiers, we must develop an understanding and appreciation of cultural and intercultural relationships in order to maintain a strong fighting force.
- As EORs, you will be required to give classes and discuss cultural issues.
- To be effective you need to understand the concept of culture, be familiar with other cultures, and some of the social or cultural issues that affect individual and group behavior.



Cultural

- **Cultural** - is defined as a learned and shared behaviors and perceptions of a group which have been transmitted from generation to generation through a shared symbol system.
 - The key is it is learned. You are not born with culture.
 - is an integral part of our nation's history, going back before the early colonies.
 - Early Native Americans, although having similar ethnic and racial identities, were culturally very different, belonging to different tribes, speaking different languages, and having a variety of different values and beliefs.



Cultural

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Subculture

- **Subculture** - is a group of people within a larger social structure who share cultural and linguistic characteristics, which are different enough to distinguish it from others within the same society.
- The military is an example of a subculture.
 - We have our own language such as, failure to repair, CTT, APFT, Article 15.”
- What characterizes a subculture is a patterned way of thinking, feeling, and believing, that is different in some respect from the rest of society.



Enculturation

- The Passing of Culture - is socially acceptable behaviors and attitudes - From the older to the younger members of a group
 - Some of examples of this are table manners.
 - When to say “please” and “thank you.”
 - “Don’t talk to strangers.”
 - Attitudes towards other people.
 - If children hear negative things about different races or ethnic groups they are being enculturated with that negative attitude.
 - The same is true if a child is enculturated to be a sexist.



Attributes of Culture

There are five attributes of culture

- **Language and Symbols**

- Methods by which individuals transmit their values, beliefs, and perceptions
- Nonverbal behaviors are also a part of the language and are also learned
- Such signals as voice inflections, eye contact, and hand gestures are learned patterns of behavior associated with the language of a given culture.



Attributes of Culture

- **Values** - those behaviors, people, things, and ideas that are considered central to a given culture.
 - Values are also part of an individual's moral judgment system, how they determine right from wrong.
 - Sometimes cultural values are expressed in the phrases of the language, such as "the American way", "the American dream", or in mottoes like "duty, honor, country."



Attributes of Culture

- **Beliefs** - are judgments or expectations that a person might have about certain things.
 - They are very similar to and closely related to someone's values.
 - A belief is often used to express how one might see the truth in the rest of the world.
 - When a larger group holds the same beliefs, that group is perceived as being part of the same culture.
 - When a large group of people hold the same beliefs, then a culture is born. Some of the beliefs in our society may be freedom of speech or religion.



Attributes of Culture

- **Patterns of Thinking** - are ways we reach conclusions, make deductions, and solve problems.
 - People from different cultures may use different patterns of thinking to reach solutions to different problems.
 - Because of the other attributes of culture, it is likely that soldiers from different cultures will have different ways of thinking about the world around them.
 - Some cultures may rely more on logic and straight deduction, while others may use more intuition or insight through emotion and feeling to reach a conclusion.
 - The way a person thinks is also a learned trait. It is part of the culture or socialization process.



Attributes of Culture

- **Customary Behaviors** - are patterns of behaving which represent the norms for a culture.
 - Some customary behaviors have a direct and rational link to values and beliefs of the culture and are necessary for the health and well being of its members.
 - Other attributes, such as dress, appearance, religion, special customs, and social courtesies are more or less subcategories of this and the attributes of culture already discussed.



Attributes of Culture

- Customary behaviors may also vary from society to society.
 - For example, a certain religious background may play a factor in how a person views abortion.
 - Another example is when someone from a small town walks down the street and meets someone, you may say “Hello.”
 - However, if you’re from a large city, and you walk down the street saying “Hello”, to everyone you pass they might think you’re strange.
 - When you’re on the subway you keep your eyes down. Or you read the little advertisements above the seats. You don’t try to look right at somebody.



Non-Attributes of Culture

- It is important to realize that certain attributes some people may perceive as being cultural are,
in fact, not attributes of culture.

- Race
- Genetics
- Ethnicity



Non-Attributes of Culture

- **Race** - is not an attribute of culture although people believe and act as though it were.
 - Race is the division of humans which has sufficient and constant inheritable traits that identify separate groups.
 - All human beings belong to the same species.
 - There is no racial group so different from another to constitute a separate or distinct specie.
 - There are more similarities between races than there are differences.
 - Culture is also not defined by race since attributes of culture are learned.
 - Reinforce that culture is learned. Race is not learned



Non-Attributes of Culture

- **Culture** - is not inborn or inherited through genes.
- Children who are abandoned in the wild or deprived of human contact will have no concept of values or beliefs nor will they assume the needs of humans who have been socialized.
 - Are you part of an ethnic group?
 - What characteristics can you identify in your group?



Non-Attributes of Culture

- **Ethnicity** - is defined as those characteristics that distinguish a group by race, religion, national origin, language or a combination of these.
 - An ethnic group is a segment of the population that possesses common characteristics and closely identifies with a cultural heritage significantly different from the general population.
 - Ethnicity can influence how a person learns the culture, but ethnicity or ethnic identity is not a learned behavior of culture.
 - However, we must be sensitive to the fact that many soldiers and civilians will behave as though their ethnicity defines who they are, what they value, or what they believe.



Non-Attributes of Culture

- Culture is not an issue of ethnic identity.
- For instance, an Italian person in Italy might wear a beret and drink coffee from little cups.
- An Italian person who lives in Houston, Texas might be a totally different person.
- He or she might wear a cowboy hat and boots.
- I don't want to be too stereotypical, but you can see that ethnicity is not necessarily the same thing as culture. It's not the sole determiner.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- Language Differences
- Being Blunt
- Testing
- Customs, Observances, and Necessities
 - Religious Holidays
 - Haircuts
 - Dietary Restrictions
- Supervisor/Subordinate Relationship
- Military Justice
- Social and Support Grouping



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- The Army is comprised of individuals from many cultures.
- When interaction between individuals is not understood or clear,
- it has implications on the soldier and the unit.
- Misunderstandings between soldiers if not resolved can lead to other more serious problems.
- In units, it can lower morale and impact on unit readiness.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Language differences** - Some individuals speak with an accent and oftentimes it affects the way they are perceived.
- Some individuals think that because a word is mispronounced that an individual is not intelligent or don't know what they are doing.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Being blunt** - Oftentimes, individuals are considered as “being blunt” because they are direct and to the point.
- In some cultures this is considered impolite or rude.
- An example of this is an article published in Saudi Arabia which stated “American Frankness Is Always Too Direct, and Usually Misunderstood as Criticism.”



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Testing** - Many tests are given in “English only” to individuals who do not speak English or have English as a second language.
 - An example is that some states offer multi-lingual driving tests while others only provide the test in two languages.
 - Is this not considered bias?
 - Furthermore, depending on where you were raised and socialized affects the knowledge you obtained and experiences (rural versus city).



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Religious holidays.** In many areas of the country Jewish Holidays are readily recognized and time off is usually given to celebrate.
- However, there are many other religions who have holidays that are not know or recognized.
- **Haircuts.** You go into a barber and you have a certain texture of hair and there is not a barber that's familiar with cutting your hair.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Supervisor - Subordinate relationships** - To be an effective supervisor requires the supervisor to possess “people skills” (leadership skills).
 - Good people skills is knowing that some behaviors are not a sign of disrespect or ignorance, but is part of that individual’s culture.
 - An excellent example is in some cultures it is disrespectful to make direct eye contact with your superiors.
 - However, in our society, if you look down while your supervisor is talking to you, it could be perceived as a sign of weakness, guilt, or a lack of trust.

Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Military justice** - Statistics have shown that minority soldiers receive a disproportionate number of UCMJ actions.
- This is a result of the military treating minority soldiers differently or minority soldiers reacting differently in a military environment.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- **Social and support groupings** - The implication here is many people perceive individuals' have social interaction only among groups or individuals because of race, ethnicity, or religion prejudices.
 - This is not usually the reason as people will prefer to interact with others who are like them.
 - There is nothing wrong in this provided you don't go out of the way to avoid certain groups or individuals because of prejudices.
 - A good example is that if the NCO Club was having a Latin night, you will see more Hispanics. Or if you go during country night, you may see more white people. It is normal? Yes it is.



Implications of Cross-Culture Interactions

- All soldiers, whether they are a leader or not, need to be aware and sensitive to different cultures.
- Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.
- That is what the Army is about. It is not only the right thing to do legally, but the right thing to do morally.



Pitfalls of Cross-Cultural Interactions

- There are three elements that cause misunderstanding between individuals of different cultures
 - Stereotyping
 - Assumptions
 - Differences



Pitfalls of Cross-Cultural Interactions

- **Stereotyping** - is defined as a person, group, event, or issue that is thought to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner and which lacks any individuality.
 - This tends to happen to all groups at one time or another.
 - We all do it, but we need to recognize that stereotyping is wrong and individuals or groups need to be seen for what they do or do not do versus oftentimes unfounded generalizations.
 - Each one of us is unique and that's the attitude we all need to work with.
 - Some stereotypes can be good, but that doesn't mean they are true.
 - We are all different and unique and you need to appreciate that.



Pitfalls of Cross-Cultural Interactions

- **Assumptions** - are a complex extension of our prejudices and stereotypes.
 - Making assumptions about others has similar characteristics to stereotyping, but may have a very different affect on people during cross-cultural interactions.
 - Stereotypes are frequently associated with negative prejudgments.
 - Assumptions based on stereotypes are supposition or acts of supposing something is true based on erroneous or incomplete information.



Pitfalls of Cross-Cultural Interactions

- **Assumptions** based on prejudices or stereotypes can create expectations which have both negative and positive perceptions.
- These assumptions can blind people to what really is being said or done and can cause a self-fulfilling prophecy.
 - Examples are; a person who displays a rebel flag is perceived as a bigot or a racist
 - Blacks who wear or display the "Malcolm X" symbol are militant
 - Asians should make good business partners because they are scrupulous and smart
 - People with strong foreign accents are untrustworthy because they are aliens



Conclusion

- The purpose of this training is to provide an opportunity for understanding the diversity that exist between ourselves.
- Everyone must learn not to see cultural differences as negative or undesirable, but a prerequisite to valuing differences. Integrating our cultural differences is a part of our American heritage.
 - Today, because of the Civil Rights Movement and the Army's EO program, soldiers and DA Civilians are more aware and sensitized to their cultural and gender differences. DA personnel are encouraged to share and discuss their differences during training and other appropriate unit or command forums.

